

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in New York City
November 2, 2015

The President. What did I miss? *[Laughter]* What did I miss? It's good to see all of you. Hello, New York! I am annoyed that I did not get to see this show again. Michelle and I love this show. It also happens to be the only thing that I think Dick Cheney and I agree on—*[laughter]*—is that this is a great show. You know when you've brought Barack Obama and Dick Cheney together that you've accomplished something. That is a cultural landmark. *[Laughter]*

Please give it up for Lin-Manuel Miranda and the entire cast. We love you! Jeffrey Sellers and the producers, give them a big round of applause. Margo Lion for always bringing me to Broadway. Our DNC treasurer, Andy Tobias. Yay, Andy! And to all of you, thank you so much for being here—although, this one is easy. *[Laughter]* I mean, you write a check, and you listen to some boring politician talking, now, that's commitment. Coming to this show, you don't get special props for this. *[Laughter]* But I love you anyway. We've got so many great friends and supporters here.

It is always good to be back in the city. I know there may be some Mets fans here tonight, and I just want you to know you should still be proud of a great season. If you're not happy, Josh Earnest, my Press Secretary, is a big Royals fan, so you can take it up with him. *[Laughter]*

Seven years ago, we came together not just to elect a President, but to reaffirm a fundamental belief—a belief that was on display here tonight—that people who love their country can change it. That's in our DNA. That's how it started. What—part of what's so powerful about this performance is, it reminds us of the vital, crazy, kinetic energy that's at the heart of America: that people who have a vision and a set of ideals can transform the world. And that's always been true. That was true at the founding. That was true for women winning the right to vote. It was true for the abolition movement and the civil rights movement. And every single step of progress that we've made has been based on this notion that people can come together and ideas can move like electricity through them and a world can change.

And that faith has been tested at times—by war and by recession and, during the course of my Presidency, by politics and obstruction and by a chorus of cynics who said that we were foolish to keep believing and naive to keep on trying—but thanks to folks like you, this country is moving forward. *[Applause]* This country is moving forward.

When I took office, we were losing 800,000 jobs a month, unemployment on the way to 11 percent. Because of you, over the last 5½ years, our businesses have created more than 13 million jobs. The unemployment rate is down to 5.1 percent. The job openings are highest in any time since the 1970s. We were warned we couldn't reform Wall Street or create new protections for consumers or ask the wealthiest Americans to pay a little bit more without stifling the markets and crushing jobs. And we did it, and the stock market more than doubled, and we've seen the longest streak of job creation in American history.

When I took office, more than 15 percent of Americans didn't have health insurance. We changed that. And for the first time on record, more than 90 percent of Americans do have coverage. Insurance companies can't discriminate against anybody because they've got a preexisting condition. They can't charge women more just for being a woman. We were told

that this would break the bank, we couldn't do it without increasing the deficits. But so far, we've covered 17 million Americans, and we've cut the deficit by two-thirds. And health care inflation has gone down at the slowest—has increased at the slowest rate in 50 years during this entire time. And it just so happens, this all started right when I signed Obamacare into law. [Laughter]

When I took office, we were hopelessly addicted to foreign oil; we've cut our oil imports by more than half. We have tripled the amount of energy we generate from wind. Twenty times more solar power is generated today than it was when I took office. We were told we couldn't grow American energy without rising emissions that caused climate change, but we did. American energy is booming. Prices are falling. As the economy continues to grow, America has cut our carbon pollution by more than any other country on Earth. That happened because of you.

When I took office, our influence around the world was waning, our standing diminished. And we changed that. Today, America leads the world in confronting new threats. We made sure Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon. We're making sure that we address climate change globally. We're writing smarter, stronger trade rules for the 21st century. We've begun a new chapter working with the Cuban people. We have brought thousands of brave Americans home to their families. There is not a measure economically by which if Ronald Reagan were here and asked the question "Are you better off than you were 4 years ago?" the answer wouldn't be yes.

And that's just on economics and on foreign policy. But of course, the idea of America that was represented here is more than just numbers, it's more than just statistics. It's about who we are, who's seen, who's recognized, whose histories are affirmed. And we were told, for example, that we couldn't change this country when it came to how we treat people based on who they love. And suddenly, marriage equality is now a reality in all 50 States. "Don't ask, don't tell" don't exist no more.

I just came from Newark, where we were leading the charge to reform our criminal justice system and make sure that we think about crime in different ways so that we keep our streets safe, but we don't incarcerate more people than any other nation on Earth; and we make sure that every child that's born in this country, no matter what they look like, where they come from, what their last name is, that they feel like they've got a place here. They feel like they belong. They feel like they count.

Now, I could go on. [Laughter] I've got a longer list. We could talk about the U.S. auto industry or the fact that high school graduations hit an alltime high or the fact that millions of young people are able to go to college that couldn't afford to go before or those DREAM Act kids who are, by every definition, Americans except for a piece of paper and we're finally saying to them, you know what, we care about you, we love you, you count.

There's a whole bunch of other stuff we can talk about. But here's what's interesting. I don't know if the Republicans who are running for this office know any of these things—[laughter]—because they occupy a different reality, it seems. [Laughter] According to them, everything was really good in 2008 when we were going through the worst economic crisis in our lifetimes. Unemployment and uninsured rates were up, and we were hopelessly addicted to foreign oil, and bin Laden was still on the loose. This apparently was the golden age that I messed up. I messed it up.

And Obamacare and immigrants and taxes and deficits all just messed everything up. [Laughter] And they're so glum. [Laughter] I mean, they're really so frustrated. And you what, look, part of our DNA is, we're always dissatisfied. That's part of what makes America great; we don't rest on our laurels. Right? We always find something wrong. And there is a lot that has to be fixed. Everybody here has got a list of things that we have to tackle.

But maybe what makes us a little different as Democrats is, we try to base our analysis on facts and reason. [Laughter] So we don't look at the evidence and see that every time a Democratic President has been in office, the economy seems to be doing a little better than when the Republican is in office. And we don't automatically say, well, you just have to vote for a Democrat every time. [Laughter] On the other hand, we don't—we also don't say that if you cut taxes for the very top 1 percent and the economy doesn't do well that doing more of that will grow the economy by 4 or 5 or 8 percent. We don't do that either because that's—factually seems to be incorrect. [Laughter]

They want to repeal the Affordable Care Act—I know that's shocking—and kick millions of people off their health insurance. But when you ask them, well, what is it that is so bothering you about people having health insurance, they can't tell you. Because originally, it was, well, it's never going to work. All right, so then it started working. And then, they say, well, it's going to blow up the deficit. And it's not blowing up the deficit. And then, they said, well, it's going to drive everybody else's premiums up. But that hasn't happened.

And so at some point, you'd think they'd say, well, maybe we should just try to work to make health insurance even better. Right? It—right? [Laughter] Right.

On climate change—now, if you went to a doctor—[laughter]—no, let's change that. You go to a hundred doctors—[laughter]—and 99 of them tell you you've got diabetes, you've got to stop eating bacon and donuts every day—[laughter]—and we have to monitor your health, and we've got to fix this—you wouldn't say, oh, they just—that's a conspiracy, they're making that up. [Laughter] All 99 of those doctors got together with Obama—[laughter]—to try to prevent me from having bacon and donuts. You wouldn't do that. That's not what you'd do. There's not a single person who would do that. [Laughter]

I mean, it would be funny, but—except this is about climate change. This was an analogy. [Laughter] And the planet is warming; 99 percent of scientists have said it's warming. And we've got the Republican chairman of the Senate energy and environment committee carrying a snowball into the Senate chambers to show that there is still snow and that climate change isn't happening. I am not making that up. [Laughter] That's what happened.

That's what happened.

Audience member. That's crazy.

The President. That's crazy. [Laughter] I was going to quote Kanye, but I can't because this is a family audience. [Laughter] But it's cray. [Laughter]

And by the way, the same thing is true on foreign policy. I don't want to keep on going, but have you noticed that every one of these candidates say: "Obama is weak. People—Putin is kicking sand in his face. When I talk to Putin"—[laughter]—"he's going to straighten out. Just looking at him, he's going to be"—[laughter]. And then, it turns out, they can't handle a bunch of CNBC moderators at a debate. I mean, let me tell you, if you can't handle those guys—[laughter]—you know, then I don't think the Chinese and the Russians are going to be too worried about you. [Laughter]

Anyway. Anyway. Look, here's the bottom line. Politics in this country have always been based on warring impulses between hope and fear. And fear is a powerful thing. And you can have a politics that's based on looking backwards and worrying about "them" versus "us," and sometimes, that can win an election or two. But that's not what's best in us. What's best in us is not fear. What's best in us is hope. What's best in us is the Statue of Liberty and welcoming in immigrants from around the world to seek a better life. What's best in us is when we're fighting to make sure that everybody in this country who's working hard gets paid a living wage.

What's best in us is saying that women should get paid the same for doing the same work that men are doing. What's best in us is when we say that employers shouldn't discriminate because of what you look like. It shouldn't discriminate because of who you love. It should simply base their judgments on the job you do and the character that you display. America is at its best when we care for the most vulnerable in our society. America is at its best when we say that the economy works when everybody's got a shot. That's not just good for workers, that's also good for businesses because then they can buy the car that you manufacture and because they've got decent wages, they can afford to buy the new appliance or buy a house or buy tickets to "Hamilton." [Laughter] That's a good thing for all of us—[laughter]—when everybody, from the bottom up, has a chance at life. That's when America is at its best.

And I know in this political season that politics sometimes doesn't seem like it reflects the commonsense and the decency and the goodness that is out there. And people get discouraged. It gets frustrating. And we have a system and we've got a media that so often rewards controversy and anger and how loud and confrontational you are.

But that's not America. That's a sliver of America. And one of the great privileges of being President of the United States is, you get to travel all around this country, and you see people from every walk of life. You talk to business leaders who have created incredible companies and changed our lives for the better and you talk to ex-offenders who have somehow found it within themselves to turn their lives around and gotten a job and are now raising families.

You talk to farmers out in little rural corners of the country who understand that they've got an obligation to do something about climate change because they're close to the Earth and they see how it affects them. You talk to hunters who are appalled by children being gunned down in their own schools and say that my interpretation of the Second Amendment is compatible with commonsense gun safety rules.

We've gone through difficult times, and people are scared sometimes. And the ground seems uncertain beneath our feet. And during those times, a politics of fear can get traction. Unless those of us who are hopeful, unless those of us who are reminded of the essential energy and passion of our Founders, unless we get involved.

So my primary message tonight—and this performance undoubtedly described it better than I ever could—is that we can't afford cynicism, and we can't afford to withdraw. We've got too much work to do for that. Our system only works when we recognize that the Government is something—is not something separate, it's us. It's not some foreign entity. It is an expression of our values collectively and who we are and what we believe and what we care about. Justice Brandeis once said, "The most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen." The office of citizen. And that's how change comes about, and that's always been my message.

As I enter into my last year in office, some supporters started getting nostalgic, and so we'll take pictures, and they'll say, "Oh, Barack, I wish you could run another term." And I explain, A—no, first of all, not everybody says that. [Laughter] But I explain, A, it's

unconstitutional. [Laughter] George Washington set a good example. B, Michelle would not permit it, even if it were constitutional. [Laughter] And, C, this has never been about me.

When I ran in 2007 and 2008—and a lot of you were onboard—I did not say, "Yes, I can." I said, "Yes, we can." Yes, we can. And so our unfinished business doesn't depend on me or Congress or even the next Democratic President, it will depend on us. It will depend on each and every one of you going back from this performance and being inspired and asking, how am I going to make a difference? What am I going to do? What am I going to stir up? What am I going to be passionate about? What am I going to feel a sense of urgency towards? How am I going to work to make sure that everybody has got a living wage? How am I going to make sure that we are passing on a planet that is livable for the next generation? How am I going to make sure that everybody in this country gets treated equally by the criminal justice system? How am I going to make sure that we live up to our most precious ideals: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights?

That's your job. That's what this election will be about. Not me, but you. What an incredible opportunity that is. What an incredible gift that our Founders gave us. Let's go change this country. Let's go change the world.

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:10 p.m. at the Richard Rodgers Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to former Vice President Richard B. Cheney; Lin-Manuel Miranda, playwright, composer, and lyricist, and Jeffrey Seller, producer, "Hamilton" musical; Margo Lion, Cochairman, President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities; musician Kanye O. West; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and John Harwood, Becky Quick, and Carl Quintanilla, moderators of the CNBC Republican Presidential debate on October 28 in Boulder, CO.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee fundraisers :: New York City.

Locations: New York City.

Names: Cheney, Richard B.; Earnest, Joshua R.; Harwood, John; Inhofe, James M.; Lion, Margo; Miranda, Lin-Manuel; Obama, Michelle; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Quick, Becky; Quintanilla, Carl; Seller, Jeffrey; Tobias, Andrew; West, Kanye O.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Racial equality; Civil rights : Wage equality; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Cuba : Relations with U.S.; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : High school graduation rate; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Elections : 2016 Presidential and congressional elections; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Domestic sources; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iran : Nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; New York : Democratic Party events; New York :

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